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ABSTRACT

This commentary focuses on the need to develop collaborative efforts between academic divisions and the community. While the role of the public school in the community has not changed, there is growing concern that the personal interactions between schools and the community have been lost, thereby dismissing students' need to understand their civic responsibilities. The article proposes practical steps for higher education institutions to follow in creating greater, more effective connections to the community. It is recommended that the first step for colleges is to identify programs that would benefit from broad-based community input in planning for the future. Then an advisory committee of community people should be developed in order to determine community needs, assist in course preparation, select students, provide technical and resource support, and assist in public relations. The article also presents examples of community outreach programs that involve community representatives in planning details, policy making, and advisory capacity. These might include coordinating gallery shows and music events, arranging for scholarships and endowments, training programs on legal concerns, placing students in public service agencies, and assisting on Main Street projects, to name a few. The paper claims that collaborative efforts by institutions of higher education with communities surrounding these institutions will renew and revitalize the key role education has played in the past and will help serve to establish new goals in the future. (JJL)

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"ACADEMIC DIVISION CONNECTIONS TO THE COMMUNITY: ESSENTIAL FOR EFFECTIVE CHANGE"

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Lea Gabbert Mills received a Master of Science degree from the University of Oregon and a Bachelor of Arts degree from San Jose State University. She is currently the Dean of the Arts and Humanities Division and Director of the Police Academy at College of the Redwoods in Eureka, California. Lea has been a community college administrator for 16 years and prior to that, taught for 20 years in public schools, adult education and community colleges.

Lea currently serves on the Statewide Student Success Course Initiative Committee sponsored by the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, the statewide board of the Association of Instructional Administrators, the Humboldt Area Foundation's Cultural Coordinating Committee, and a number of local and regional community-based boards and commissions.

"Everybody is obliged to be responsible." Charles Dickens

"Unfortunately, we have entered a phase in our society where education is valued for what it will give you rather than what it will make out of you." Vartan Gregorian

Collaborating and connecting with the communities served by institutions of higher education is increasingly important as our schools and society experience a time of rapid growth and change. The mutually beneficial value of these interactions is realized by the positive responses of representative students, faculty, administrators, and community people engaged in collaborative activities between the college and the community.

Education reaches into every aspect of life in our society and has historically been a major contributor to growth and change in U.S. society. In the past, as this nation was developing and expanding, public schools were central to community development and civic activity. From the days of boarding the teacher in community homes, to using the school building as a community meeting site, school personnel, students, parents, and the general community were united in their appreciation of the value that diverse ideas and shared guidance gave to the educational process. To some extent the role of the public school in the community has not changed, although many of the very vital and personal interactions between schools and community have been lost.

In contrast, higher education institutions have always received the public respect, but have never been seen as an integral part of the community. In his foreword to Values and Ethics in Higher Education (Report One - 1992 ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Reports) Jonathan D. Fife states: ''

"Higher education is an organization that society has given a great deal of respect and freedom . . . . . This distinctive position originally was the result of four factors. First, a college education was considered important primarily to the intellectually and socially elite. Second, the intellectual activities of colleges were mysterious and felt to be beyond the understanding of the average person. Third, while it was fashionable for a community to have a college, its size and demand on the public dollar were small. Fourth, and most important, colleges, along with the church, were considered the moral leaders of society."

Today, higher education continues to be considered one of the most important social institutions in our society. The traditional goals of: providing and educated citizenry; transmitting culture; understanding social, economic and civic life; defining the rights and responsibilities of each citizen; promoting self discipline; fostering leaders; and developing occupational job skills are still in effect, but institutions of higher education can no longer achieve these goals while remote from community involvement. This very important linkage must be an institution-wide commitment to community planning and collaborations on mutually beneficial goals. As the many current problems and opportunities facing colleges and communities are addressed, solutions will require

varied points of view, respect for those views, and the ability to build connections with disparate representative communities. Higher education must be involved in this process through consistent, dedicated, and vital interactions that provide a forum for ideas that become the catalyst for the decisions necessary for the future.

Many students need the collegiate experience to assist them in not only understanding their personal responsibility in the learning process, but also in understanding their civic responsibility in contributing to the common good. Students attending institutions that have made a commitment to collaborative activities that involve experiential learning and community volunteer experiences have benefitted by the practical knowledge and the behavior modeled by faculty and administrators productively contributing to college/community development.

Since the concept of formal community connections is relatively new to the academic disciplines in higher education the need for direction, process, and scope must be considered. Certainly these disciplines can learn from the very effective and efficient models developed by the business and technical programs of the community college system. The business and technical programs have developed and implemented many forms of interaction with local and regional businesses and agencies in an effort to understand future workforce needs and to envision new programs in response to the concerns expressed by this community. These collaborative efforts achieved through specific advisory committees, company training, and business seminars and workshops, have successfully educated community college personnel about the specific types of technical assistance and training programs needed by employers, and educated employers on the scope of programs and services available through community college programs. In addition, through an organized and systematic sharing of information an annual assessment of needs, services, resources and activities has been maintained and stronger, complementary programs developed.

As academic divisions take on new leadership roles in establishing community connections, the positive growth potential of both the higher education institution and the community will be realized. Identifying appropriate programs, development and functions of advisory committees, joint ventures, mentoring, and field projects are some of the areas that can be considered when working on college and community linkages. The academic disciplines of the arts, behavioral and social sciences, law, health, community planning, and others benefit from collaborating on training, education, and community growth and development.

The first step for colleges interested in developing collaborative efforts is to identify programs that would benefit from broad-based community input that could assist in planning for the future. Once this has been determined an advisory committee composed of community people recognized for their expertise and interest in the discipline or program would be developed. There are five key functions for advisory committees.

1. Determines Community Needs

2. Assists in the Preparation of Courses of Study
3. Helps Select and/or Place Students
4. Guides and Supports in Technical and Resources Matters
5. Assists in Public Relations

The development of an actively participating advisory committee is especially important for joint ventures, mentoring projects, and student field placements.

The following are a limited number of examples of community outreach programs that academic divisions may consider involving community representatives in the planning details, policy making, and advisory capacity.

ARTS:

*Coordinating or co-sponsoring gallery shows
*Co-sponsoring Music Events
*Scheduling local theater productions as college classes
*Advising on changes in the field and how changes affect curriculum
*Assisting in setting up and managing endowments

SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES:

*Advisory committees for social welfare, addictions studies, gerontology and CALWorks programs
*Placing students in public service agencies in either field work or service learning capacities. Examples: senior resource center, Planned Parenthood, hospitals, camps, boys and girls clubs, etc.
* Arranging for scholarships and endowments

LAW/ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE:

*Advisory committees for input on current needs, curriculum, State requirements, lecturers, student placements
*Co-sponsorship of Meet the Judges, Juvenile Justice forums
*Training programs on legal concerns for parents, foster parents

COMMUNITY PLANNING:

*Sociological studies conducted by students researching prisons, jails, juvenile needs, homelessness, after-school services, housing for senior citizens, etc.
*Cooperation and collaboration of human services

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

*Advisory committee on education and training needs of the business community
*Assisting on Main Street projects

In conclusion, collaborative efforts by institutions of higher education with communities surrounding these institutions will renew and revitalize the key role education has played in the past and will serve to establish new goals for the future. In his book, A World of Ideas, Bill Moyers interviewed a number of public thinkers on a variety of subjects. In the introduction he stated:

> ". . . . . I found a love of sharing, a passion for connecting. In their own way, all of the men and women with whom I talked are teachers. Sharing is the essence of teaching. It is, I have come to believe, the essence of civilization. The impulse to share turns politics from the mere pursuit of power and makes of journalism a public service. It inspires art, builds cities, and spreads knowledge. Without it, the imagination is but the echo of the self, trapped in a soundproof chamber, reverberating upon itself until it is spent in exhaustion or futility. For this reason democracy, with all its risks, must be a public affair. Ideas cry out for an open hearing, and the true conversation of democracy occurs not between politicians or pundits but across the entire spectrum of American life where people take seriously the intellectual obligations of citizenship and the spiritual opportunities of freedom."

Academic divisions have the opportunity to educate and participate beyond their traditional audiences in collaborative connections with the community at large. Change is happening so rapidly that institutions must position themselves to seize all of the creative opportunities to share the future in business, education, science, politics, the arts and civic responsibility.